Get to know University Councillor Opiyo Oloya, Artsci’83, Ed’86:


1. **Why did you select Queen’s University?**
   On March 6, 1981, I fled my home country Uganda into neighbouring Kenya. A second-year student at Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda, I had participated in student protests for democracy in Uganda.

   As a refugee in Kenya, with three other students, I began looking for opportunity to continue my studies. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees in Nairobi put me and my friends in touch with the Canadian High Commission in Kenya. After initial interviews, I got word I was travelling to Canada to a city called Kingston. I was sponsored to come to Queen’s by World University Service of Canada (WUSC), Queen’s Branch. I arrived on June 7, 1981, and began summer classes the next morning.

2. **Most memorable moment as a student?**
   Many but nothing beats the first day on Queen’s campus, June 8, 1981, walking into Dr. Brian Osborne’s (now Professor Emeritus) summer Geography class in Mackintosh-Corry Hall. He was a great teacher, relaxed in a turtle-neck and tweed-coat and interactive with his students. They were discussing acid rain, and I had no clue why or how rain could be acidic. Although it took me many weeks to become attuned to the “Canadian accent”, there was no mistaking the warm welcome the Dr. Osborne and the class gave me.

3. **What is your job?**
   I am a superintendent of schools with the York Catholic District School Board, just north of the city of Toronto. My work includes working directly with the senior team, parishes, school principals, teachers, students and parents.
4. **What’s the best career advice you’ve ever received?**

The best career advice was given by Dr. David Mclay (Professor Emeritus, Department of Physics) in the spring of 1985. After listening to a talk I gave to children from schools in Kingston at the then Queen’s International Center about my background and culture, he told me I would make an excellent teacher. He encouraged me to apply to McArthur College for the September 1985, was accepted and graduated in June 1986. To this day, teaching children gives me as much joy as it did back then.

5. **What’s the career highlight you’re most proud of?**

There are a few. Undertaking doctoral research at the Faculty of Education at York University (September 2004—October 2010), looking at the issues of the child soldier was an eye-opener for me. The research which culminated in a successful doctoral defense in 2010 and the publication of *Child to Soldier* (University of Toronto Press, 2013) allowed me a unique window to peer into a problem I had heard so much about but knew so little about.

My summer research with peacekeeping troops of the African Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) beginning in August 2010 to date has added an international dimension to my experience. Working with soldiers in difficult and dangerous circumstances to chronicle their stories and publishing them in *Black Hawks Rising* (Helion & Company Press, 2016) was a huge privilege.

Most humbling was the recognition by York University in the spring of 2012 with an honorary Doctorate of Law (*LLD honoris causa*) for humanitarian work in East and Central Africa generally and Somali specifically.

6. **How do you spend your free time?**

I enjoy spending time with my family—Emily and the boys, Oceng and Ogaba. Most Sundays we enjoy driving to small towns in southern Ontario to discover the local attractions. The best part is spent at home cooking and baking—I love to bake just about everything, but especially artisanal bread and sconces.

I do spend some spare time dabbling in creative writing—I have just completed the second draft of my autobiography which partly speaks about my life at Queen’s University, and beginning to look for possible publishers. I have tried fiction but that has taken a back seat at the moment while I complete a manuscript I am working on. I read for pleasure whenever I can.

I do enjoy listening to music from all over continental Africa and has a diverse collection including from Nigeria, Senegal, Mali, Ghana, South Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Madagascar, Uganda and so on. Through music, I am learning to speak Lingala, a language spoken in the DRC.
7. **What motivated you to stand for election for University Council?**
   Queen’s was my first home when I landed in Canada on that day in June 1981. I was picked up from Pearson International Airport and driven the same night to Kingston. My first day in Canada, literally, was waking up at Queen’s. The warm welcome by faculty, students and the city of Kingston remains deep in my heart. I was embraced as one of their own. The fundraisers for my tuitions and scholastic needs (not forgetting that first winter goose-padded coat with racoon fur at the fringes of the hood) made me belong. Standing as a councillor to give a bit of my time to Queen’s and especially to the students is a privilege and the least I can do.

8. **Your aspirations for being on University Council?**
   I plan to make the best use of the confidence given by the Queen’s community by supporting initiatives that promote diversity, inclusivity and that expand the international reach of the university.

9. **Anything else you would like to add/highlight?**
   It is feels great to be back home.

**Connect with Opiyo on:**
LinkedIn: [https://www.linkedin.com/in/opiyo-oloya-57aa59162/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/opiyo-oloya-57aa59162/)
Twitter: [@Opiyooloya](https://twitter.com/Opiyooloya)
Email: [Opiyo.oloya@gmail.com](mailto:Opiyo.oloya@gmail.com)